BIRD·AND·BOVGH

John Burroughs

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK

BIRD AND BOUGH

Bird and Bough

BY JOHN BURROUGHS

"Some said, John, print it; others said, Not so"
BUNYAN

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
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1906

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TO

THE KINGLET

THAT SANG IN MY EVERGREENS IN OCTOBER AND

MADE ME THINK IT WAS MAY

PREFACE

Two or three years ago, a writer in one of the leading New York papers, commenting unfavorably upon some recent utterances of mine in one of the magazines, said that my readers could forgive me everything but my poetry. Now I am going to presume that some of them, at least, can forgive me even that. Have I not had letters from a few of them — I do not say how many — expressing a desire to see my verses collected in a volume? Could any poet withstand the appeal of even a few disinterested persons who expressed so reasonable and so modest a wish? At any rate, I shall let their suggestion overweigh the adverse opinion of the hard-hearted critic just referred to.

The one thing that I claim for my verses is that they keep a little closer to our wild nature — to the birds, the flowers, the seasons — than most of our minor poetry has done. I do not believe the reader will find a hint of any Flora or Fauna but our own in my pages.

Then if I have also succeeded in bringing home the bough with the bird I heard singing upon it, or some suggestion of its place in the fields and woods and in the season, my title will need no explanation.

January, 1906. J. B.

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BIRD AND BOUGH

THE PARTRIDGE

List the booming from afar,
  Soft as hum of roving bee,
Vague as when on distant bar
  Fall the cataracts of the sea.

Yet again, a sound astray,
  Was it the humming of the mill?
Was it cannon leagues away?
  Or dynamite beyond the hill?

'T is the grouse with kindled soul,
  Wistful of his mate and nest,
Sounding forth his vernal roll
  On his love-enkindled breast.

List his fervid morning drum,
  List his summons soft and deep,
Calling spice-bush till she come,
  Waking bloodroot from her sleep.

Ah! ruffled drummer, let thy wings
  Beat a march the days will heed,
Wake and spur the tardy spring,
Till minstrel voices jocund ring,
  And spring is spring in very deed.

A MARCH GLEE

I HEAR the wild geese honking
From out the misty night,—
A sound of moving armies
On-sweeping in their might;
The river ice is drifting
Beneath their northward flight.

I hear the bluebird plaintive
From out the morning sky,
Or see his wings a-twinkle
That with the azure vie;
No other bird more welcome,
No more prophetic cry.

I hear the sparrow's ditty
Anear my study door;
A simple song of gladness
That winter days are o'er;
My heart is singing with him,
I love him more and more.

I hear the starling fluting
His liquid "O-ka-lee;"
I hear the downy drumming,

A MARCH GLEE

His vernal reveillé;
From out the maple orchard
The nuthatch calls to me.

•

Oh, spring is surely coming,
Her couriers fill the air;
Each morn are new arrivals,
Each night her ways prepare;
I scent her fragrant garments,
Her foot is on the stair.

THE BLUEBIRD

A WISTFUL note from out the sky,
"Pure, pure, pure," in plaintive tone,
As if the wand'rer were alone,
And hardly knew to sing or cry.

But now a flash of eager wing,
Flitting, twinkling by the wall,
And pleadings sweet and am'rous call, —
Ah, now I know his heart doth sing!

O bluebird, welcome back again,
Thy azure coat and ruddy vest
Are hues that April loveth best, —
Warm skies above the furrowed plain.

The farm boy hears thy tender voice,
And visions come of crystal days,
With sugar-camps in maple ways,
And scenes that make his heart rejoice.

The lucid smoke drifts on the breeze,
The steaming pans are mantling white,
And thy blue wing 's a joyous sight,
Among the brown and leafless trees.

THE BLUEBIRD

Now loosened currents glance and run,
  And buckets shine on sturdy boles,
  The forest folk peep from their holes,
And work is play from sun to sun.

The Downy beats his sounding limb,
  The nuthatch pipes his nasal call,
  And robin perched on treetop tall
Heavenward lifts his evening hymn.

Now go and bring thy homesick bride,
  Persuade her here is just the place
  To build a home and found a race
In Downy's cell, my lodge beside.

THE SONG OF THE TOAD

HAVE you heard the blinking toad
Sing his solo by the river
When April nights are soft and warm,
And spring is all a-quiver?
If there are jewels in his head,
His wits they often muddle, —
His mate full often lays her eggs
Into a drying puddle.

The jewel 's in his throat, I ween,
And song in ample measure,
For he can make the welkin ring,
And do it at his leisure.
At ease he sits upon the pool,
And, void of fuss or trouble,
Makes vesper music fit for kings
From out an empty bubble:

A long-drawn-out and tolling cry,
That drifts above the chorus
Of shriller voices from the marsh
That April nights send o'er us;
A tender monotone of song
With vernal longings blending,

THE SONG OF THE TOAD

That rises from the ponds and pools,
  And seems at times unending;

A linkèd chain of bubbling notes,
  When birds have ceased their calling,
That lulls the ear with soothing sound
  Like voice of water falling.
It is the knell of Winter dead;
  Good-by, his icy fetter.
Blessings on thy warty head:
  No bird could do it better.

THE COMING OF PHŒBE

When buckets shine 'gainst maple trees
And drop by drop the sap doth flow,
When days are warm, but nights do freeze,
And deep in woods lie drifts of snow,
When cattle low and fret in stall,
Then morning brings the phœbe's call,
"Phœbe,
Phœbe, phœbe," a cheery note,
While cackling hens make such a rout.

When snowbanks run, and hills are bare,
And early bees hum round the hive,
When woodchucks creep from out their lair
Right glad to find themselves alive,
When sheep go nibbling through the fields,
Then Phœbe oft her name reveals,
"Phœbe,
Phœbe, phœbe," a plaintive cry,
While jacksnipes call in morning sky.

When wild ducks quack in creek and pond
And bluebirds perch on mullein-stalks,
When spring has burst her icy bond
And in brown fields the sleek crow walks,

THE COMING OF PHŒBE

When chipmunks court in roadside walls,
Then phœbe from the ridge-board calls,
"Phœbe,
Phœbe, phœbe," and lifts her cap,
While smoking Dick doth boil the sap.

SPRING GLADNESS

Now clap your hands together,
For this is April weather,
  And love again is born;
The west wind is caressing,
The turf your feet are pressing
  Is thrilling to the morn.

To see the grass a-greening,
To find each day new meaning
  In sky and tree and ground;
To see the waters glisten,
To linger long, and listen
  To every wakening sound!

To feel your nerves a-tingle
By grackle's strident jingle
  Or starling's brooky call,
Or phœbe's salutation,
Or sparrow's proclamation
  Atop the garden wall!

The maple trees are thrilling,
Their eager juices spilling
  In many a sugar-camp.

SPRING GLADNESS

I see the buckets gleaming,
I see the smoke and steaming,
  I smell the fragrant damp.

The mourning-dove is cooing,
The husky crow is wooing,
  I hear his raucous vows;
The robin's breast is glowing,
Warm hues of earth are showing
  Behind the early plows.

I love each April token
And every word that's spoken
  In field or grove or vale, —
The hyla's twilight chorus,
The clanging geese that o'er us
  Keep well the northern trail.

Oh, soon with heaping measures
The spring will bring her treasures
  To gladden every breast;
The sky with warmth a-beaming,
The earth with love a-teeming —
  In life itself new zest!

EARLY APRIL

Behold the robin's breast aglow
As on the lawn he seeks his game;
His cap a darker hue doth show,
His bill a yellow flame.

Now in the elm-tops see the swarm
Of swelling buds like bees in May;
The maples, too, have tints blood warm,
And willows show a golden ray.

In sunny woods the mould makes room
For liver leaf to ope her eye;
A tiny firmament of bloom
With stars upon a mimic sky.

Forth from the hive go voyaging bees,
Cruising far each sunny hour;
Scenting sap 'mid maple trees,
Or sifting bread from sawdust flour.

Up from the marsh a chorus shrill
Of piping frogs swells in the night;
The meadowlark shows flashing quill
As o'er brown fields she takes her flight.

EARLY APRIL

Now " mourning-cloak " takes up her clew
  And dances through the sunny glades;
And sluggish turtles painted new
  Are creeping forth where bittern wades.

Now screaming hawks soar o'er the wood,
  And sparrows red haunt bushy banks;
The starlings gossip, " Life is good,"
  And grackles pass in sable ranks.

The rye-fields show a tender hue
  Of fresh'ning green amid the brown,
And pussy-willow 's clad anew
  Along the brook in silver gown.

The purple finch hath found his tongue,
  From out the elm tree what a burst!
Now once again all things are young,
  Renewed by love as at the first.

HEPATICA

When April's in her genial mood,
And leafy smells are in the wood,
  In sunny nook, by bank or brook,
Behold this lovely sisterhood.

A spirit sleeping in the mould,
And tucked about by leafage old,
  Opens an eye blue as the sky,
And trusting takes the sun or cold.

Before a leaf is on the tree,
Or booms the roving bumblebee,
  She hears a voice, "Arise, rejoice!"
In furry vestments cometh she.

Before the oven-bird has sung,
Or thrush or chewink found a tongue,
  She ventures out and looks about,
And once again the world is young.

Sometimes she stands in white array,
Sometimes as pink as dawning day,
  Or every shade of azure made,
And oft with breath as sweet as May.

HEPATICA

Sometimes she bideth all alone,
And lifts her face beside a stone, —
  A child at play along the way,
When all her happy mates have flown.

Again in bands she beams around,
And brightens all the littered ground,
  And holds the gaze in leafless ways —
A concert sweet without a sound.

Like robin's song or bluebird's wing,
Or throats that make the marshes ring,
  Her beaming face and winsome grace
Are greetings from the heart of spring.

TRAILING ARBUTUS

SEQUESTERED flower of April days,
Thy covert bloom in forest ways
A spell about me weaves;
Thy frosted petals faint pink glow,
Crystal pure like urns of snow
That all with incense overflow,
Half hid beneath the leaves.

Thy ear lies close upon the ground,
Far off it hears the thrilling sound
Of spring's oncoming feet;
Nor lingering snow, nor chilling day,
Can long the genial hours delay
That fill thy chalice sweet.

Thy brittle leaves so harsh and hard,
So torn by winds, by winter marred,
Enhance thy tender face;
But he whose days are evergreen,
Though storms may come and frosts be keen,
Is sharer in thy grace.

ARBUTUS DAYS

I

Days! days! arbutus days!
They come from heaven on high;
They wrap the world in brooding haze,
They marry earth and sky.

What lures me onward o'er the hills,
Or down the beaten trail?
Vague murmuring all the valley fills,
And yonder calls the quail.

Like mother bird upon her nest
The day broods o'er the earth;
Fresh hope and life fill every breast;
I share the spring's new birth.

II

Awake! arise! and April wise
Seek out a forest side,
Where under wreaths of withered leaves
The shy sweet flowers hide.

I hear the hum of red-ruff's drum,
And hark! the thrasher sings;

His russet form 's against the sky,
And bold his mimickings.

Upon my soul, he calls the roll
Of all the birds o' the year —
"Veery!" "Cheewink!" "Oriole!" "Bob-olink!"
"Make haste!" "The spring is here."

Now pause and mark the meadowlark
Send forth his call to spring;
"Why don't you hear? 'T is spring o' the year!" —
Like dart from sounding string.

Ah! golden shaft, 't was he that laughed
And lifted up his bill;
"Wick, wick; wick, wick;" "Wake up, be quick;"
The ant is on her hill.

The bloodroot's face with saintly grace
Stars all the unkempt way,
Upon the rocks in merry flocks
Dicentra dances gay.

The hemlock trees hum in the breeze,
The swallow 's on the wing;
In forest aisles are genial smiles,
To greet thy burgeoning.

ARBUTUS DAYS

III

Again the sun is over all,
Again the robin's evening call
Or early morning lay,
I hear the stir about the farms,
I see the earth with open arms,
I feel the breath of May.

THE BUSH-SPARROW

In the bushy pastures
  Ere April days are done,
Or 'long the forest border
  Ere chewink has begun,
Is Spizella trilling
  In notes that circling run
Like wavelets in the water
  A-rippling in the sun.

A gentle, timid rustic
  Who makes the dingle ring,
Or round about the orchard
  Where bush and brier cling.
Most tuneful of the sparrows,
  My bird with russet wing, —
A joy in early summer,
  A thrill in early spring.

His coat has russet trimmings,
  And russet is his crown;
Less bright and trim of feather
  Than chippy, near the town;
A plainer country cousin,
  With plainer country gown,

THE BUSH-SPARROW

Who loves the warmth of summer,
  But dreads the autumn's frown.

He hides in weedy vineyards
  When August days are here,
And taps the purple clusters
  For a bit of social cheer;
The boys have caught him at it,
  The proof is fairly clear;
And still I bid him welcome,
  The pilf'ring little dear;
He pays me off in music,
  And pays me every year.

THE SWALLOW

At play in April skies that spread
Their azure depths above my head,
As onward to the woods I sped,
  I heard the swallow twitter;
Oh, skater in the fields of air,
On steely wings that sweep and dare,
To gain these scenes thy only care,
  Nor fear the winds are bitter.

This call from thee is tidings dear,
The news that crowns the vernal year,
'T is true, 't is true, the swallow 's here,
  The south wind brings her greeting;
Thy voice is neither call nor song,
And yet it starts a varied throng
Of fancies sweet and memories long, —
  It sounds like lovers meeting.

I know thou dost not kiss on wing,
I know thou dost not pipe or sing,
Or bill or coo, or any such thing,
  And yet these sounds ecstatic;
Thy ruddy breast from over seas,
Like embers quickened by the breeze,

Now feels the warmth of love's decrees
That make thy needs emphatic.

Ah, well I know thy deep-dyed vest,
Thy burnished wing, thy feathered nest,
Thy lyric flight at love's behest,
And all thy ways so airy.
Thou art a nursling of the air,
No earthly food makes up thy fare,
But soaring things both frail and rare, —
Fit diet of a fairy.

I see thee sit upon the ground
And stoop and stare and hobble round,
As if thy silly legs were bound,
Or it were freezing weather;
Thou hast but little need of feet, —
To gather mortar for thy seat,
To perch on wires above the street,
Or pick up straw or feather.

Kind nature gave thee power of flight,
And sheen of plume and iris bright,
And everything that was thy right,
And thou art well contented;
In August days thy young are grown,
Then southward turn to warmer zone,
And follow where thy mates have flown,
But leave our love cemented.

EARLY MAY

THE time that hints the coming leaf,
When buds are dropping chaff and scale,
And, wafted from the greening vale,
Are pungent odors, keen as grief.

Now shad-bush wears a robe of white,
And orchards hint a leafy screen;
While willows drop their veils of green
Above the limpid waters bright.

New songsters come with every morn,
And whippoorwill is overdue,
While spice-bush gold is coined anew
Before her tardy leaves are born.

The cowslip now with radiant face
Makes mimic sunshine in the shade,
Anemone is not afraid,
Although she trembles in her place.

Now adder's-tongue new gilds the mould,
The ferns unroll their woolly coils,
And honey-bee begins her toils
Where maple trees their fringe unfold.

EARLY MAY

The goldfinch dons his summer coat,
  The wild bee drones her mellow bass,
  And butterflies of hardy race
In genial sunshine bask and float.

The Artist now is sketching in
  The outlines of his broad design
  So soon to deepen line on line,
Till June and summer days begin.

Now Shadow soon will pitch her tent
  Beneath the trees in grove and field,
  And all the wounds of life be healed,
By orchard bloom and lilac scent.

IN MAY

When grosbeaks show a damask rose
  Amid the cherry blossoms white,
And early robins' nests disclose
  To loving eyes a joyous sight;

When columbines like living coals
  Are gleaming 'gainst the lichened rocks,
And at the foot of mossy boles
  Are young anemones in flocks;

When ginger-root beneath twin leaves
  Conceals its dusky floral bell,
And showy orchid shyly weaves
  In humid nook its fragrant spell;

When dandelion's coin of gold
  Anew is minted on the lawn,
And apple trees their buds unfold,
  While warblers storm the groves at dawn;

When such delights greet eye and ear,
  Then strike thy tasks and come away:
It is the joy-month of the year,
  And onward sweeps the tide of May.

IN MAY

When farmhouse doors stand open wide
  To welcome in the balmy air,
When truant boys plunge in the tide,
  And school-girls knots of violets wear;

When grapevines crimson in the shoot,
  Like fin of trout in meadow stream,
And morning brings the thrush's flute
  Where dappled lilies nod and dream;

When varied tints outline the trees,
  Like figures sketched upon a screen,
And all the forest shows degrees
  Of tawny red and yellow-green;

When purple finches sing and soar,
  Then drop to perch on open wing,
With vernal gladness running o'er —
  The feathered lyrist of the spring:

When joys like these salute the sense,
  And bloom and perfume fill the day,
Then waiting long hath recompense,
  And all the world is glad with May.

IN BLOOMING ORCHARDS

AGAIN I walk 'mid orchard bloom
  And linger long with willing feet;
I walk with sighs, but not in gloom,
For in my heart is ample room
  For pensive thoughts and musings sweet.

Ah, pensive thoughts, to these I'm prone,
  When, strolling 'neath the pink white boughs,
I breathe the fragrance, hear the drone
Of eager bees that come from home,
  In forest near, or gardened house.

My thoughts go homeward with the bees;
  I dream of youth and happier days —
Of orchards where amid the trees
I loitered free from Time's decrees,
  And loved the birds and learned their ways.

Oh, orchard thoughts and orchard sighs,
  Ye, too, are born of life's regrets!
The apple bloom I see with eyes
That have grown sad in growing wise,
  Through Mays that manhood ne'er forgets.

THE CUCKOO

STRANGE, reserved, unsocial bird,
Flitting, peering 'mid the leaves,
Thy lonely call a twofold word
Repeated like a soul that grieves —
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou" — a solemn plaint
Now loud and full, now far and faint.

A joyless wingèd anchorite,
Or hapless exile in the land,
Oft intoning in the night
A rune I fain would understand —
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," a boding cry,
When night enfolds the earth and sky.

With eye and motions of the dove,
And throat that swells and heaves,
Thy life seems quite untouched by love,
Or by the spell that passion weaves.
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," a doleful note,
From out a smooth and dovelike throat.

Thy nest a little scaffolding
Of loosely woven boughs,
Compared with nests of birds that sing,
A hut beside a house.

"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," unsocial sound,
When blithe and festive calls abound.

Art prophet of the coming rain—
The raincrow, wise in weather lore?
Or dost thou try to say in vain
The words of thine in days of yore?
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou." Weird thy call,
Though happy skies are over all.

"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," repeated oft,
Like one who half recalls the chimes
Of "Cuckoo," "Cuckoo," in wood and croft,
Across the seas in Wordsworth's times.
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," thy cheerless strain
To country folk foretelleth rain.

Thy voice hath lost its blithesome tone,
Thy ways have changed from gay to grave;
Do nesting cares make thee to moan
Since finchie now is not thy slave?
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," in voice forlorn,
As if thy breast were on a thorn.

But thou hast gained in love, I ween,
And gained in hue a burnished brown;
In thicket dense thy nest is seen,
And love of young is now thy crown.
"Kou-kou," "Kou-kou," a call of love,
Though doleful as a mourning-dove.

COLUMBINE

I STROLLED along the beaten way,
  Where hoary cliffs uprear their heads,
And all the firstlings of the May
  Were peeping from their leafy beds,
When, dancing in its rocky frame,
I saw th' columbine's flower of flame.

Above a lichened niche it clung,
  Or did it leap from out a seam? —
Some hidden fire had found a tongue
  And burst to light with vivid gleam.
It thrilled the eye, it cheered the place,
And gave the ledge a living grace.

The redstart flashing up and down,
  The oriole whistling in the elm,
The kinglet with his ruby crown —
  All wear the colors of thy realm;
And starling, too, with glowing coals —
So shine thy lamps by oak-tree boles.

I saw them a-flaming
  Against the gray rocks;
I saw them in couples,
  I saw them in flocks.

COLUMBINE

They danced in the breezes,
  They glowed in the sun,
They nodded and beckoned,
  Rejoiced every one.

Some grew by the wayside,
  Some peered from the ledge,
Some flamed from a crevice,
  And clung like a wedge;
Some rooted in débris
  Of rocks and of trees,
And all were inviting
  The wild banded bees.

Nature knows well the use of foils,
  And knoweth how to recompense;
There lurks a grace in all her toils
  And in her ruder elements;
And oft doth gleam a tenderness
The eye to charm, the ear to bless.

THE VESPER SPARROW

Dear minstrel of the twilight fields,
Whose voice from out a tranquil breast
In vesper hymn sweet solace yields
When closing day invites to rest,
"Peace, good-will," and then good-night,
While toil and care now take their flight.

Now rests thy form close to the ground,
Or perched upon a warm gray stone
As upward floats this lulling sound,
Cheering thy mate who sits alone,
"Peace, good-will," and then to rest,
With loving thoughts of mate and nest.

Thy nest is hidden in the grass,
If blending colors be to hide —
Like raindrop resting on the glass,
Or darting grayling in the tide.
"Peace, good-will," then close the eye
While fades the light in western sky.

The shadows deepen 'neath the hills,
I breathe the breath of summer nights —
The pastoral fragrance that o'erspills
These gently sloping grassy heights.

"Peace, good-will," then fold the wings
Till morrow's sun new gladness brings.

Thy vespers rise from near and far
When groves are hushed and meadows mute;
Sometimes I catch a single bar
Like wandering notes from silver flute.
"Peace, good-will," warm broods the night
While moon and stars shed silvery light.

A bleating lamb just stirs the hush
That soft is stealing o'er the scene;
Then faintly comes the roar and rush
Of distant train the hills between.
"Peace, good-will," and do not fear,
Thy watchful mate is ever near.

Now all is still, the day is done,
Thy head is tucked beneath the wing,
A silver web by Luna spun
O'er all the hills is glistening.
"Peace, good-will," and then good-night
Till skies are filled with morning light.

JUNE'S COMING

Now have come the shining days
  When field and wood are robed anew,
And o'er the world a silver haze
  Mingles the emerald with the blue.

Summer now doth clothe the land
  In garments free from spot or stain —
The lustrous leaves, the hills untanned,
  The vivid meads, the glaucous grain.

The day looks new, a coin unworn,
  Freshly stamped in heavenly mint:
The sky keeps on its look of morn;
  Of age and death there is no hint.

How soft the landscape near and far!
  A shining veil the trees infold;
The day remembers moon and star;
  A silver lining hath its gold.

Again I see the clover bloom,
  And wade in grasses lush and sweet;
Again has vanished all my gloom
  With daisies smiling at my feet.

JUNE'S COMING

Again from out the garden hives
  The exodus of frenzied bees;
The humming cyclone onward drives,
  Or finds repose amid the trees.

At dawn the river seems a shade —
  A liquid shadow deep as space;
But when the sun the mist has laid,
  A diamond shower smites its face.

The season's tide now nears its height,
  And gives to earth an aspect new;
Now every shoal is hid from sight,
  With current fresh as morning dew.

THE HERMIT THRUSH

In the primal forest's hush,
Listen! . . . the hermit thrush!
Silver chords of purest sound
Pealing through the depths profound,
Tranquil rapture, unafraid
In the fragrant morning shade.

Pausing in the twilight dim,
Hear him lift his evening hymn,
Clear it rings from mountain crest,
Pulsing out from speckled breast.
Day is done, the moon doth soar,
Still the hermit, o'er and o'er,
In the deep'ning twilight long
Holds and swells his cadenced song.

Purest sounds are farthest heard,
Voice of man or song of bird,
And the hermit's silver horn
In dreaming night or dewy morn
Is a serene, ethereal psalm,
Devoutly gay, divinely calm —
The soul of song, the breath of prayer,
In melody beyond compare,
'T is borne afar on every breeze,

Nor captive held by housing trees.
Where louder voices faint and fail
The hermit's purer tones prevail.

O silver throat, O golden heart,
What magic in thy artless art!
In boyhood days I knew thee well
And yielded to thy music's spell.
Thy tawny wing, thy silent flight,
Thy gesture soft when thou didst light,
Thy graceful pose, thy gentle mien,
Thy still reserve when thou wast seen.
I knew the woods where thou didst bide,
I knew the nest that was thy pride —
An open secret on the ground
By russet leaves encompassed round.

I linger long where thou dost sing,
To drink my fill of everything
That waves above or blooms below,
And all that sylvan spirits know —
The hoary trunks, the whispering leaves,
Pewee that pensive sighs and grieves,
Clintonia with her modest bells,
Columbine with honeyed cells,
Violet pale and orchid rare,
Fragrant brakes and maiden-hair,
Mitchella with her floral twins,
Crimson fruit that partridge wins,

THE HERMIT THRUSH

Oxalis with her girlish face,
Squirrel corn with leafy grace,
Herb Robert rank, with veinèd eye,
And liver leaf "to match the sky" —
These and others fair and sweet
Bedeck the floor of thy retreat.

Two other birds oft with thee fare
And syllable the wilding air.
The veery thrush blows in his flute
When all but thou and he are mute —
Reverb'rant note in leafy halls
That echo to his fluty calls.
And winter wren with thee abides, —
A dapper bird that skulks and hides,
Now court'sying on a mossy stone,
Then ducking 'neath a tree-trunk prone;
Pert his mien, his wondrous throat
Quivers and throbs with rapid note —
A lyric burst with power imbued
To thrill and shake the solitude.

But thou art master in these aisles,
Our troubled hearts thy strain beguiles;
Deep solemn joy thy soul knoweth well.
Chant on, from heights where thou dost dwell,
Thy hymn of faith, thy peace, thy prayer —
A benediction on the air.

BOBOLINK

Daisies, clover, buttercup,
  Red-top, trefoil, meadowsweet,
Ecstatic pinions, soaring up,
  Then gliding down to grassy seat.

Sunshine, laughter, mad desires,
  May day, June day, lucid skies,
All reckless moods that love inspires —
  The gladdest bird that sings and flies.

Meadows, orchards, bending sprays,
  Rushes, lilies, billowy wheat,
Song and frolic fill his days,
  A feathered rondeau all complete.

Pink bloom, gold bloom, fleabane white,
  Dewdrop, raindrop, cooling shade,
Bubbling throat and hovering flight,
  And jocund heart as e'er was made.

MIDSUMMER IN THE CATSKILLS

The strident hum of sickle-bar,
Like giant insect heard afar,
  Is on the air again;
I see the mower where he rides
Above the level grassy tides
  That flood the meadow plain.

The barns are fragrant with new hay,
Through open doors the swallows play
  On wayward, glancing wing;
The bobolinks are on the oats,
And gorging stills the jocund throats
  That made the meadows ring.

The cradlers twain, with right good-will,
Leave golden lines across the hill
  Beneath the midday sun.
The cattle dream 'neath leafy tent,
Or chew the cud of sweet content
  Knee-deep in pond or run.

July is on her burning throne,
And binds the land with torrid zone,
  That hastes the ripening grain;

MIDSUMMER IN THE CATSKILLS

While sleepers swelter in the night,
The lusty corn is gaining might
  And darkening on the plain.

The butterflies sip nectar sweet
Where gummy milkweeds offer treat
  Or catnip bids them stay.
On banded wing grasshoppers poise,
With hovering flight and shuffling noise,
  Above the dusty way.

The thistle-bird, midsummer's pet,
In billowy flight on wings of jet,
  Is circling near his mate.
The silent waxwing's pointed crest
Is seen above her orchard nest,
  Where cherries linger late.

The dome of day o'erbrims with sound
From humming wings on errands bound
  Above the sleeping fields;
The linden's bloom faint scents the breeze,
And, sole and blessed 'mid forest trees,
  A honeyed harvest yields.

Poisèd and full is summer's tide,
Brimming all the horizon wide,
  In varied verdure dressed;

MIDSUMMER IN THE CATSKILLS

Its viewless currents surge and beat
In airy billows at my feet
  Here on the mountain's crest.

Through pearly depths I see the farms,
Where sweating forms and bronzèd arms
  Reap in the land's increase;
In ripe repose the forests stand,
And veilèd heights on every hand
  Swim in a sea of peace.

THE INDIGO-BIRD

Oh, late to come but long to sing,
My little finch of deep-dyed wing,
  I welcome thee this day!
Thou comest with the orchard bloom,
The azure days, the sweet perfume
  That fills the breath of May.

A wingèd gem amid the trees,
A cheery strain upon the breeze
  From treetop sifting down;
A leafy nest in covert low,
When daisies come and brambles blow,
  A mate in Quaker brown.

But most I prize, past summer's prime,
When other throats have ceased to chime,
  Thy faithful treetop strain;
No brilliant bursts our ears enthrall —
A prelude with a "dying fall"
  That soothes the summer's pain.

Where blackcaps sweeten in the shade,
And clematis a bower hath made,
  Or in the bushy fields,

THE INDIGO-BIRD

On breezy slopes where cattle graze,
At noon on dreamy August days,
  Thy strain its solace yields.

Oh, bird inured to sun and heat,
And steeped in summer languor sweet,
  The tranquil days are thine.
The season's fret and urge are o'er,
Its tide is loitering on the shore;
  Make thy contentment mine!

TO THE BEE BALM

Unmoved I saw you blooming,
Your crimson cap uplooming
  Above the jewel weed;
'T is true I passed unheeding,
Unmindful of your pleading,
  Until she gave you heed.

But when she paused and plucked you,
And in her bosom tucked you,
  And filled her girlish hands,
New beauty filled your measure,
You shone a woodland treasure
  Amid the floral clans.

Your martial look grew tender,
More winsome was your splendor
  With her beside the stream;
Rare gift to charm she brought you,
With her own graces fraught you,
  Retouched your glowing beam.

I soon forgot my trouting,
Repented of my flouting
  Your brave and festive look;

TO THE BEE BALM

I saw in you new meaning,
A nodding or a leaning
  Beside the purling brook.

Oh, day I long shall cherish,
Nor let one vision perish
  That filled each sunny hour.
The phœbe's mossy chamber,
The pool like liquid amber,
  That mirrored maid and flower.

THE CARDINAL FLOWER

Like peal of a bugle
  Upon the still night,
So flames her deep scarlet
  In dim forest light.

A heart-throb of color
  Lit up the dim nook,
A dash of deep scarlet
  The dark shadows shook.

Thou darling of August,
  Thou flame of her flame,
'T is only bold Autumn
  Thy ardor can tame.

IN OCTOBER

Now comes the sunset of the verdant year,
Chemic fires, still and slow,
Burn in the leaves, till trees and groves appear
Dipped in the sunset's glow.

Through many-stained windows of the wood
The day sends down its beams,
Till all the acorn-punctured solitude
Of sunshine softly dreams.

I take my way where sentry cedars stand
Along the bushy lane,
And whitethroats stir and call on every hand,
Or lift their wavering strain;

The hazel-bush holds up its crinkled gold
And scents the loit'ring breeze —
A nuptial wreath amid its leafage old
That laughs at frost's decrees.

A purple bloom is creeping o'er the ash —
Dull wine against the day,
While dusky cedars wear a crimson sash
Of woodbine's kindled spray.

IN OCTOBER

I see the stolid oak tree's smould'ring fire
Sullen against emerald rye;
And yonder sugar maple's wild desire
To match the sunset sky.

On hedge and tree the bittersweet has hung
Its fruit that looks a flower;
While alder spray with coral berries strung
Is part of autumn's dower.

The plaintive calls of bluebirds fill the air,
Wand'ring voices in the morn;
The ruby kinglet, flitting here and there,
Winds again his elfin horn.

Now Downy shyly drills his winter cell,
His white chips strew the ground;
While squirrels bark from hill or acorned dell —
A true autumnal sound.

I hear the feathered thunder of the grouse
Soft rolling through the wood,
Or pause to note where hurrying mole or mouse
Just stirs the solitude.

Anon the furtive flock-call of the quail
Comes up from weedy fields;
Afar the mellow thud of lonely flail
Its homely music yields.

IN OCTOBER

Behold the orchards piled with painted spheres
    New plucked from bending trees;
And bronzèd huskers tossing golden ears
    In genial sun and breeze.

Once more the tranquil days brood o'er the hills,
    And soothe earth's toiling breast;
A benediction all the landscape fills
    That breathes of peace and rest

THE DOWNY WOODPECKER

Downy came and dwelt with me,
  Taught me hermit lore;
Drilled his cell in oaken tree
  Near my cabin door.

Architect of his own home
  In the forest dim,
Carving its inverted dome
  In a dozy limb.

Carved it deep and shaped it true
  With his little bill;
Took no thought about the view,
  Whether dale or hill.

Shook the chips upon the ground,
  Careless who might see,
Hark! his hatchet's muffled sound
  Hewing in the tree.

Round his door as compass-mark,
  True and smooth his wall;
Just a shadow on the bark
  Points you to his hall.

THE DOWNY WOODPECKER

Downy leads a hermit life
All the winter through;
Free his days from jar and strife,
And his cares are few.

Waking up the frozen woods,
Shaking down the snows;
Many trees of many moods
Echo to his blows.

When the storms of winter rage,
Be it night or day,
Then I know my little page
Sleeps the time away.

Downy's stores are in the trees,
Egg and ant and grub;
Juicy tidbits, rich as cheese,
Hid in stump and stub.

Rat-tat-tat his chisel goes,
Cutting out his prey;
Every boring insect knows
When he comes its way.

Always rapping at their doors,
Never welcome he;
All his kind, they vote, are bores,
Whom they dread to see.

THE DOWNY WOODPECKER

Why does Downy live alone
  In his snug retreat?
Has he found that near the bone
  Is the sweetest meat?

Birdie craved another fate
  When the spring had come;
Advertised him for a mate
  On his dry-limb drum.

Drummed her up and drew her near,
  In the April morn,
Till she owned him for her dear
  In his state forlorn.

Now he shirks all family cares,
  This I must confess;
Quite absorbed in self affairs
  In the season's stress.

We are neighbors well agreed
  Of a common lot;
Peace and love our only creed
  In this charmèd spot.

THE CROW

I

My friend and neighbor through the year,
Self-appointed overseer

Of my crops of fruit and grain,
Of my woods and furrowed plain,

Claim thy tithings right and left,
I shall never call it theft.

Nature wisely made the law,
And I fail to find a flaw

In thy title to the earth,
And all it holds of any worth.

I like thy self-complacent air,
I like thy ways so free from care,

Thy landlord stroll about my fields,
Quickly noting what each yields;

Thy courtly mien and bearing bold,
As if thy claim were bought with gold;

THE CROW

Thy floating shape against the sky,
When days are calm and clouds are high;

Thy thrifty flight ere rise of sun,
Thy homing clans when day is done.

Hues protective are not thine,
So sleek thy coat each quill doth shine.

Diamond black to end of toe,
Thy counter-point the crystal snow.

II

Never plaintive nor appealing,
Quite at home when thou art stealing,

Always groomed to tip of feather,
Calm and trim in every weather,

Morn till night my woods policing,
Every sound thy watch increasing.

Hawk and owl in treetop hiding
Feel the shame of thy deriding.

Naught escapes thy observation,
None but dread thy accusation.

THE CROW

III

Hunters, prowlers, woodland lovers
Vainly seek the leafy covers.

Noisy, scheming, and predacious,
With demeanor almost gracious.

Dowered with leisure, void of hurry,
Void of fuss and void of worry,

Friendly bandit, Robin Hood,
Judge and jury of the wood,

Or Captain Kidd of sable quill,
Hiding treasures in the hill.

Nature made thee for each season,
Gave thee wit for ample reason,

Good crow wit that's always burnished
Like the coat her care has furnished.

May thy numbers ne'er diminish,
I'll befriend thee till life's finish.

May I never cease to meet thee,
May I never have to eat thee.

And mayest thou never have to fare so
That thou playest the part of scare crow.

SNOW-BIRDS

From out the white and pulsing storm
I hear the snow-birds calling;
The sheeted winds stalk o'er the hills,
And fast the snow is falling.

Like children laughing at their play
I hear the birds a-twitter,
What care they that the skies are dim
Or that the cold is bitter?

On twinkling wings they eddy past,
At home amid the drifting,
Or seek the hills and weedy fields
Where fast the snow is sifting.

Their coats are dappled white and brown
Like fields in winter weather,
But on the azure sky they float
Like snowflakes knit together.

I've heard them on the spotless hills
Where fox and hound were playing,
The while I stood with eager ear
Bent on the distant baying.

SNOW-BIRDS

The unmown fields are their preserves,
  Where weeds and grass are seeding;
They know the lure of distant stacks
  Where houseless herds are feeding.

O cheery bird of winter cold,
  I bless thy every feather;
Thy voice brings back dear boyhood days
  When we were gay together.

THE HEART O' THE WOODS

I HEAR it beat in morning still
When April skies have lost their gloom,
And through the woods there runs a thrill
That wakes arbutus into bloom.

I hear it throb in sprouting May —
A muffled murmur on the breeze,
Like mellow thunder leagues away,
Or booming voice of distant seas.

Or when the autumn leaves are shed,
And frosts attend the fading year,
Like secret mine sprung by my tread
A covey bursts from hiding near.

I feel its pulse 'mid winter snows,
And feel my own with added force,
When partridge drops his cautious pose,
And forward takes his humming course.

The startled birches shake their curls,
A withered leaf leaps in the breeze;
Some hidden mortar speaks, and hurls
Its feathered missile through the trees.

THE HEART O' THE WOODS

Compact of life, of fervent wing,
A dynamo of feathered power,
Thy drum is music in the spring,
Thy flight is music every hour.

TO THE OREGON ROBIN

O VARIED thrush! O robin strange!
Behold my mute surprise.
Thy form and flight I long have known,
But not this new disguise.

I do not know thy slaty coat,
Thy vest with darker zone;
I'm puzzled by thy recluse ways
And song in monotone.

I left thee 'mid my orchard's bloom,
When May had crowned the year;
Thy nest was on the apple-bough,
Where rose thy carol clear.

Thou lurest now through fragrant shades,
Where hoary spruces grow;
Where floor of moss infolds the foot,
Like depths of fallen snow.

I follow fast, or pause alert,
To spy out thy retreat;
Or see thee perched on tree or shrub,
Where field and forest meet.

TO THE OREGON ROBIN

Thy voice is like a hermit's reed
  That solitude beguiles;
Again 't is like a silver bell
  Atune in forest aisles.

Throw off, throw off this masquerade
  And don thy ruddy vest,
And let me find thee, as of old,
  Beside thy orchard nest.

KADIAK, July, 1899

TO THE GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW IN ALASKA

Oh, minstrel of these borean hills,
Where twilight hours are long,
I would my boyhood's fragrant days
Had known thy plaintive song,

Had known thy vest of ashen gray,
Thy coat of drab and brown,
The bands of jet upon thy head,
That clasp thy golden crown.

We heard thee in the cold White Pass,
Where cloud and mountain meet,
Again where Muir's great glacier shone
Far spread beneath our feet.

I bask me now on emerald heights
To catch thy faintest strain;
But cannot tell if in thy lay
Be more of joy or pain.

Far off behold the snow-white peaks
Athwart the sea's blue shade;
Anear there rise green Kadiak hills,
Wherein thy nest is made.

TO THE GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW

I hear the wild bee's mellow chord,
  In airs that swim above;
The lesser hermit tunes his flute,
  To solitude and love.

But thou, sweet singer of the wild,
  I give more heed to thee;
Thy wistful note of fond regret
  Strikes deeper chords in me.

Farewell, dear bird, I turn my face
  To other skies than thine;
A thousand leagues of land and sea
  Between thy home and mine.

KADIAK, July, 1899

TO THE LAPLAND LONGSPUR

O THOU northland bobolink,
Looking over summer's brink,
Up to Winter, worn and dim,
Where he peers from mountain rim,
Out upon the Bering Sea,
To higher lands where he may flee,
Something takes me in thy note,
Quivering wing and bubbling throat;
Something moves me in thy ways —
Bird, rejoicing in thy days,
In thy upward hovering flight,
In thy suit of black and white,
Chestnut cap and circled crown,
In thy mate of speckled brown;
Surely I may pause and think
Of my boyhood's bobolink.

Soaring over meadows wild —
Greener pastures never smiled —
Raining music from above,
Full of rapture, full of love;
Sportive, gay, and debonair,
Yet not all exempt from care,
For thy nest is in the grass,
And thou worriest as I pass;
But nor hand nor foot of mine
Shall do harm to thee or thine;

TO THE LAPLAND LONGSPUR

Musing, I but pause to think
Of my boyhood's bobolink.

But no bobolink of mine
Ever sang o'er mead so fine —
Starred with flowers of every hue,
Gold and purple, white and blue,
Painted cup, anemone,
Jacob's ladder, fleur-de-lis,
Orchid, harebell, shooting-star,
Crane's-bill, lupine, seen afar,
Primrose, rubus, saxifrage,
Pictured type on nature's page —
These and others here unnamed
In northland gardens yet untamed,
Deck the fields where thou dost sing,
Mounting up on trembling wing;
While in wistful mood I think
Of my boyhood's bobolink.

On Unalaska's emerald lea,
On lonely isles in Bering Sea,
On far Siberia's barren shore,
On north Alaska's tundra floor;
At morn, at noon, in pallid night,
We heard thy song, and saw thy flight,
And I, while sighing, could but think
Of my boyhood's bobolink.

UNALASKA, July, 1899

THE RETURN

He sought the old scenes with eager feet —
The scenes he had known as a boy;
"Oh, for a draught of those fountains sweet,
And a taste of that vanished joy!"

He roamed the fields, he wooed the streams,
His schoolboy paths essayed to trace;
The orchard ways recalled his dreams,
The hills were like his mother's face.

O sad, sad hills! O cold, cold hearth!
In sorrow he learned this truth —
One may return to the place of his birth,
He cannot go back to his youth.

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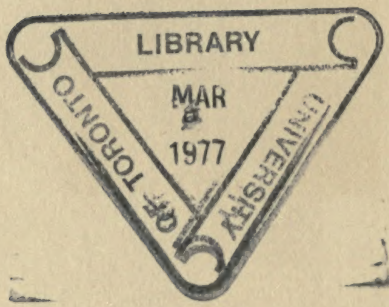
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